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THE MONTHLY GULL BULLETIN

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

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AUGUST MEETING: The next regular meeting of the Association will be held on Thursday evening, 14th inst., at eight o'clock, in the Assembly Hall of the Public Library, corner of McAllister and Larkin Sts. Take elevator to third floor. Car lines No. 5 or No. 19.

This is the annual "experience meeting," coming at the end of the vacation season. Visitors are welcome and members or others are urged to contribute to the success of the occasion by recounting observations of birds during their outings since Spring. Every report helps and it is hoped that each one present will have something to tell.

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AUGUST FIELD TRIP will be taken on Sunday, August 17th, revisiting the beautiful gardens of Mr. J. Frank Wadsworth at Lansdale, and then to explore the San Anselmo creek region.

Take 8:15 ferry to Sausalito and Manor train, getting off at Lansdale. Purchase round trip tickets to Fairfax, 60c. Bring lunch and canteens. Miss Dorothy Schroder, leader.

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OIL—BIRDS—INSECTS

The persistent agitation of the question of preventing the discharge of oily bilge and other tank residues upon the waters of our harbors, rivers and ocean borders has effected a very material improvement in practices, but much still remains to be accomplished. From records that I have kept, it is apparent that waste oil exercises an influence upon bird life which is quite as sinister on land, in the interior of the state, as when it is spread upon the waters. Although my business takes me but seldom into the oil fields, my limited observations furnish very definite evidence of serious destruction of useful birds.

In most of the oil fields the soil is sandy and it is necessary to oil a road to the well site before the rig can be brought in. During sinking operations, the drill frequently passes through strata of oil-bearing sand which are of no commercial importance, but which discharge oil into the hole, which is bailed out with the mud, thus forming a dump of oil and shale. When a gusher is brought in, it is often accompanied by a high gas pressure, spouting the oil at times high above the derrick head. The spray, caught by the wind, is carried some distance in varying amounts before the well can be shut down. Not infrequently the casing and valves are carried away by the pressure and weeks may pass before the oil is brought under control.

This oil naturally forms in pools in the lower portions of the surrounding country, where it starts to solidify and in time may reach a density sufficient for it to bear the weight of a man, but this is a slow process, depending upon the action of the sun in evaporating the volatile constituents and of the wind

in covering the surface with dust. Thereafter, this accumulation of oil may remain for years before some heavy rain washes the earth from underneath, allowing the cake to break up and start its journey oceanward. It is at the time when the oil is fresh that the greatest loss takes place among the inland birds, for oil and feathers mix readily and with only one result,—starvation for the bird.

This sticky, semi-fluid surface seems to catch myriads of bugs and our beautiful and useful meadowlark, (especially in the spring migration), tries to use these dumps as a feeding ground. My records show 84 dead birds.

The kildeers that love to feed in the saline pools and ponds of these districts may mistake the oil for water, in the night, as all of the 36 dead of this species were away from the edges of the oil pools.

The desert horned larks, residents of these districts, fall easy victims, as shown by my count of 108 dead. Other victims observed have been: stilts, avocets, vultures, crows, Brewer and red-winged blackbirds, white pelicans, night herons, orioles or tanagers and many others which could not be identified.

It seems possible that birds in flight might be overcome by gases given off under the action of the sun's rays.

Some mammals meet death at the pools and I have observed the coyote making his rounds there for an easily obtained meal and, although this destructive animal finds no warm spot in my heart, I cannot but admire his adaptability to his surroundings and his skill in maintaining himself against man and all of man's destructive ways. I only wish that our birds were half as shrewd.

Years ago, the farmers of the northern part of our state fought a long and bitter battle to halt the filling of their rivers with debris from hydraulic mining. They finally won and saved thousands of fertile acres from destruction, large portions of which now support flourishing fruit orchards. But unless the present day destruction of our insect eating birds is halted, these lands have been saved by the debris law only to be given over, with thousands of other acres, to the ravages of insects.

It has been my good fortune to witness a striking example of the service rendered by birds to the fruit ranches in one of our counties which had developed a grasshopper invasion of alarming dimensions, and where county officials had started a campaign of poisoning to destroy the invading hosts. On topping a rise on the highway I beheld the greatest gathering of birds, other than water-fowl, that I have ever witnessed. The highway was covered for a half-mile with a seething mass of feathers. Brewer blackbirds I estimated at 10,000 but one guess was as good as another for they were in countless numbers. Of crows, (the birds that zealous powder makers would destroy to protect the ranchers!), about 200; yellow-billed magpies, 64; bi-colored redwings, a few; shrikes, 5; highly excited black phoebes, 6; western king birds, 16; burrowing owls, 11; horned larks, about 100; meadow larks, about 300; song sparrow; many linnets, chipping sparrows and lark sparrows. Above the seething mass of hoppers and birds flitted a goodly number of barn swallows, while low down in the air, like couriers, were three vultures.

It would seem that even the seed-eating sparrows were intent upon demonstrating their value as guardians of the ranches and I believe it may be said without contradiction that this portion of the country was being defended by its feathered forces far better than could have been hoped from the use of poison.

Carl R. Smith.

THE AUDUBON PROGRAM

The July *Bulletin of the American Game Protective Association* is devoted in its entirety to Bird and Fish Conservation, and every article in it merits careful study and support. Under the title "New International Movement for Bird Protection," Dr. T. Gilbert Pearson, President National Association of Audubon Societies, summarizes the situation in the United States, compares it with that in Europe, outlines a scheme of conduct for the Audubon campaign and tells of work done in organizing an international committee to foster the intelligent conservation of bird life. Deprecating exaggerated sentimentality and misplaced zeal as well as blind indifference and wanton waste, Dr. Pearson offers wise counsel to all classes of citizen, thus:

"To have proper protection of wild life in this country we must have, as far as possible, unanimity of feeling; we must have friendly co-operation. The idea must not get abroad that the sportsmen's organizations and the Audubon Societies are groups of people whose aims and interests are totally different, for such is not the case, at least so far as the Audubon idea as represented by the National Association of Audubon Societies is concerned. * * * "

"To my mind the great fundamental principle to take into consideration is the education of the public, to get the sportsmen's organizations in the frame of mind where they will say, 'On our territory here in this state we may kill twenty-five birds every day that we go hunting; let us agree among ourselves that we will kill only twenty or fifteen.' Let the sportsmen's organizations all over the country bring the matter up at their meetings and say, 'Boys, let us not kill all the game; let us display a proper spirit in this thing.' We must cultivate general public sentiment in the matter; we must enlist in the ranks of those supporting the cause every scientific institution in the country, every public spirited organization. We must get the editors of scientific, trade and popular magazines to put forth the right sort of propaganda with a view to arousing the people and getting them interested in the subject."

"Throughout the entire world to-day the wild life is being exploited. Certain species of whales have almost passed away and the whaling business is at a low ebb. Recently whalers down in the southern seas have been trying out the oil of the poor penguins. Everything in this world in the way of wild life is being exploited to-day, with the exception of that which is found in certain restricted regions. * * * "

After describing experiences in England, Holland, Norway, Luxembourg, France and Switzerland, Dr. Pearson continues:

"Without going further into detail, our international committee is now formed, with national groups in eleven countries, and they are actively functioning in at least seven of these. Countries interested in the movement, besides those I have named, are Italy, United States, Canada, Hungary and Australia. The whole plan is educational. We are exchanging publications; as interesting things appear in any country, copies are sent to the members of the international committee in other countries. An active campaign is being started on the oil pollution matter. I had the very great pleasure of doing some work for this bill which was put through the British Parliament. * * * "

"The peoples of many other countries sit in far greater darkness than we do on this subject of bird conservation. We are the greatest and the richest nation in all the world. We have a great natural heritage of wild bird and animal life, some species of which we are allowing to slip away forever. My plea would be that we might all make up our minds to learn personally more about the value of birds, to learn about their relationships to the agricultural interests of the country and to disseminate knowledge in that respect. Every game department in the United States should have a trained ornithologist lecturing to the people of that state."

CALIFORNIA GREAT BLUE HERON

Years ago this bird was confined to an area much more limited than of late, for it is fond of water and, with the advance of the irrigation ditches, it has followed these channels over our great valleys and up into the foothills of the Sierra, showing a goodly increase in numbers. In spite of their being among our most useful birds, there is no doubt that many are killed just to see how far a gun will carry.

As a gopher killer, the heron stands supreme. Waiting is his specialty and, as time is no object, he always gets the gopher. As these birds have spread about, they seem to have become tamer. Often I see them in the ditches within a few feet of inhabited houses, and the time may come when they will be to this country as the stork is to Europe.

I have heard a few criticisms of them. One turkey raiser complains of their killing young turkeys. A party at Crow's Landing says that they kill young ducks that persist in using the ditches for swimming pools. A rabbit fancier contends that young rabbits are considered a delicacy by these birds. But without questioning these reports, I cannot believe that this mild bird, which in my experience reserves his aggressiveness for fish, frogs and gophers, will ever become other than beneficial to man.

CARL R. SMITH.

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JULY FIELD TRIP was taken on Sunday, the 13th, to the Claremont Hotel grounds, Claremont canyon, along the ridge and down through Strawberry canyon to the stadium. Except in the hotel grounds, the birds were rather scarce and shy. The lazuli bunting and Bell sparrow we just could not find at all. Not a hawk did we see and only one Nuttall sparrow sang for us. However, we added three birds to last year's list,—coast jay, linnet and vireo.

Birds encountered were: California quail, red-shafted flicker, Anna hummer, western flycatcher; coast and California jays, purple finch, linnet and green-backed goldfinch; Nuttall and song sparrows, San Francisco and California towhees and black-headed grosbeak; warbling vireo, pileolated warbler, bush and wren tits, russet-backed thrush and robin. Twenty species.

Members in attendance were: Miss Cohen, Miss Sterne, Ananda Jacobs and Mr. Thomas. As guests, Miss Bastian, Miss Newton and Felix Jacobs. Four members and three guests.

C. R. THOMAS.

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

FOR THE STUDY AND THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

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